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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 000808

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SUBJECT: MUSHARRAF DISCUSSES ELECTIONS, HIS ROLE, AND EFFORTS IN THE FATA WITH CODEL HUTCHISON

REF: Islamabad 764

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

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¶1. (C) Summary: President Musharraf discussed elections, set out his vision for a President whose party is in the minority, and explained the GOP's continuing efforts to combat extremism in the FATA to CODEL Hutchison on February 22. Regarding elections, Musharraf thought that the most important message is that the people of Pakistan voted overwhelming for a moderate government, given the rout of the religious parties, particularly in the North West Frontier Province. As a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Hutchison pledged her support for Musharraf's continuing efforts. Musharraf was relaxed, but clearly tired. End summary.

¶2. (C) President Musharraf met February 22 with Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) and Representative Michael Burgess (R-TX) to discuss elections, his vision for a President whose party is in the minority, and explained the GOP's continuing efforts to combat extremism in the FATA. Musharraf was relaxed and cordial, but appeared tired. Foreign Secretary Khan and Ambassador also attended the meeting.

Elections

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¶3. (C) After Musharraf welcomed the CODEL, Senator Hutchison remarked that "the eyes of the world were on Pakistan" this week and offered her assessment that the elections were "good" and went "in a fair way." She added that there are always winners and losers and, speaking from experience, remarked that there is a constructive role for the minority party. Musharraf replied that "it was not his election" since he had already been re-elected President last year. He hoped that "whatever emerges from the elections would strengthen Pakistan's political process" and highlighted that, given the election results, no one party has the ability to form a government. He believed that the new government would continue efforts on the war against terrorism, sustain economic and was pleased that the election outcome clearly favored moderate, rather than religious parties.

¶4. (C) Hutchison hoped that Musharraf could bring the winning political parties together, emphasizing that political stability is necessary for continued economic success. The Senator highlighted the role of Pakistani-Americans in Texas, particularly the

contributions of the entrepreneurs to economic growth. She had recently attended the annual Houston Pakistani Chamber of Commerce dinner. She cited the success of M.J. Khan, a Pakistani-American who is considered as a future Houston mayoral candidate. Musharraf appreciated that there were some positive stories about expatriate Pakistanis to counter the usual negative press.

The President's role in a minority government

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¶15. (C) Emphasizing the importance of a stable government for continued economic growth, Senator Hutchison asked how a President representing a minority party would work with a coalition government that might not comprise his party. After explaining that "the Prime Minister's role is to run the country" and that he has no Constitutional authority to intervene, Musharraf said that the President has no real role to play beyond acting as an advisor. Commenting that he has already played an advisory role for the past five years, "if the Prime Minister needs my help, he can ask." The Army Chief was also welcome to solicit the President's advice.

¶16. (C) Otherwise, Musharraf said he would devote his time to golf, tennis and swimming. He promised to work with the new Prime Minister and Army Chief but emphasized again that he had no formal role and that he will let the Prime Minister "run Pakistan." Hutchison remarked that that "it would be very positive if Musharraf can work with the new government as there is much to be done to combat terrorism and improve education and infrastructure."

Efforts to combat extremism in the FATA

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¶17. (C) Highlighting that Senator Hutchison is on the Senate

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Appropriations Committee, Ambassador asked the President to outline recent GOP efforts to combat extremism in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Musharraf set the stage by explaining that Pakistan sees the fight against terrorism "very differently" than the United States. Al-Qaida has been reduced to "only very small numbers" in the mountain areas along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border; they are no longer in the valleys. He expressed concern with the Taliban-al-Qaida "networking" along the border since al-Qaida "has the brains, resources, and influence to franchise terrorism through these characters."

¶18. (C) Musharraf outlined the steps that the GOP has taken to combat extremism in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). First, the GOP extended a curfew along a three kilometer area that was particularly prone to cross-border movement. As a result, the President cited ISAF statistics that cross-border movements had decreased by 42 percent. Second, the GOP had undertaken military actions to clear extremists from Swat. While the extremist leader Mullah Fazlullah is still at large, the GOP is engaged in an active manhunt. As proof that this strategy is working, Musharraf proudly explained that Election Day turnout had been good in the tribal agencies and that the results there "clearly indicated that the population is against extremism."

¶19. (C) Regarding the recent North Waziristan peace treaty that had "caused so much alarm in the West," Musharraf tried to allay any concerns. He explained that this treaty is actually a "turning point" brought on by the "massive GOP military attacks" in this area.

As a result, he considers that the GOP has been negotiating from a position of strength and that this agreement will eliminate all foreigners from this area and will strengthen the GOP's military, political and social undertakings. He also mentioned that similar treaties are in negotiation in other areas of the FATA.

¶10. (C) In response to Senator Hutchison's question regarding Sharia law, Musharraf expressed his firm belief that Baitullah Mehsud was behind the Bhutto assassination and that "he must be eliminated" but that he has most likely taken refuge in Afghanistan. The GOP has blocked three exit points into Afghanistan and has used Pakistani Air Force gun ships in its efforts to capture Mehsud.

Hutchison ready to be supportive

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¶11. (C) At the close of the meeting, Senator Hutchison told the President that as a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, she wants to be "very supportive" of Musharraf's efforts. She emphasized that it is "very important to get Afghanistan on its feet to ward off terrorism, narcotics trafficking, and crime." Representative Burgess agreed, emphasizing the importance of sustained efforts along the Pakistan-Afghan border. Musharraf remarked that "this is a long-term effort," particularly on the military and intelligence side given the extremists' long-term strategy.

¶12. (C) Musharraf closed the meeting by reiterating that Pakistani society is "religious but moderate" and that the GOP is looking at increased efforts on education and poverty alleviation to curb the influence of the extremists on the most vulnerable sectors of society. He made a plea for "understanding the complexity" of Pakistan's simultaneous efforts on combating poverty, illiteracy, and encouraging employment and wealth creation.

¶13. (U) This cable was drafted after CODEL Hutchison's departure.

PATTERSON